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AN

# ADDRESS OF WELCOME,

FROM THE

LIBRARIANS OF PHILADELPHIA,

TO THE

CONGRESS OF LIBRARIANS OF THE UNITED STATES,

ASSEMBLED OCTOBER 4, 1876,

IN THE HALL OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA,

BY

JOHN WILLIAM WALLACE,

PRESIDENT OF THE SAID SOCIETY.

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PHILADELPHIA:

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## LIBRARIANS OF THE UNITED STATES:

In behalf of the librarians of this city—seated in the circular recess behind me—I welcome you cordially to Philadelphia, and in behalf of the members of the Historical Society of our State, and for myself as well, I welcome you most cordially to this our Hall. Philadelphia in the course of her history has been the seat of many conventions. Until this year, however—this great year, both of our city and our nation—she has never had the happiness, so far as I recollect, to see within her limits a convention of librarians. The centennial year cannot, I think, but lend some distinction to it; and it, perhaps, will not be the least worthy of the distinctions of the centennial year.

But I regard this great anniversary of the nation less as the cause of this new sort of congress than as the occasion of which it avails itself to assemble. It has been somewhat obvious, I think, for several years past and is now entirely plain that with the much-increased and still much-increasing issue of books from the printing press—several matters up to this time little thought of by librarians—indeed not requiring to be much thought of by them—now demand consideration and, so far as practicable, a provision for the time not far distant when they are likely to come upon us.

The increase of books to which I refer, is to be attributed in some part, I suppose, to the facility with which of late times, in consequence of the application of chemical agencies instead as formerly of mechanical ones alone, to the paper-makers' art, paper itself is made; in greater part still, to the power which steam has given to the printing press, and in greatest part of all to the establishment of common schools and colleges everywhere throughout this country, by which both the capacity to write and the disposition and the ability to read are vastly increased. And as I see nothing which is

likely to arrest this progress of things, alike scientific and social, I see nothing which in coming years is to stand between the librarian and an issue upon him of books upon books, so vast and so uninterrupted that unless he brings the benefit of something like SCIENCE to his aid he will be overwhelmed and buried in their very mass.

This vision of the future suggests a variety of thoughts.

In the first place, a problem arises—one which concerns more especially our opulent libraries, or such a library as that of Congress, where every book that secures a copyright is preserved—a problem as to what form of building is best suited for the library edifice. It is plain, if our larger libraries are to continue as most of them now are, libraries of a general sort—panological collections, as we may call them—that before another century is over, immense edifices will be required, through the mere force of accumulation, to hold the volumes of which the libraries are composed. What form of such large edifice will best unite external effect with capacity of extension—indefinite extension it must be, in some direction—with safety, with convenience, and with beauty of interior? And how far, if all these things cannot coexist, must that characteristic which delights the eye give way to that which saves the feet and assists the hand; in other words, with that which promotes a capacity for getting volumes promptly from their places—often in the huge edifices which the mental eye already sees before it, far distant from the seat of the librarian—and, after they have been used, of getting the volumes promptly again to their places.

Next. In the much-increased and ever increasing number of books coming into our libraries—those which have already entered being, we must remember, always to be preserved—how are all best to be disposed of locally; disposed of, I mean, upon the shelves of those vast buildings which the coming years present to our view? Are they to be disposed of by subjects, by size, by alphabetical arrangement; by order of publication to the world; by order of

advent to the library, or by something different from each of these? If arrangement be by subjects, or alphabetically, then in the progress and prospects of every sort of science and of every sort of human thing, and of treatises upon them all that are sure to follow, what extent of open space is to be left in each subject for probable additions of future works upon it? And in what way are these voids to be disguised so as best to obviate the appearance of a library ever incomplete? If a library has books divided according to subjects, and if all the space allotted to each subject is occupied by the books of the day when the library is formed, rearrangement, on the shelves, of the classes—nay, frequent rearrangement of the books *in* the classes—becomes requisite to accommodate in the best way future treatises in the same class. And the like thing is true of one arranged alphabetically. Rearrangement of a small library is a small matter, one which is easily accomplished and which, for the sake of giving better order and system to the whole, it is always worth while to effect. But rearrangement of a large library is a different thing indeed. Rearrangement implies renumbering. Renumbering implies recataloguing. Recataloguing implies reprinting. And when the library counts its books by hundreds of thousands—and even by millions, as in the coming times our large libraries seem likely to do—when the books cover acres of shelves and weigh hundreds and thousands of tons, the rearrangement will become nigh to an impossibility. It would consume the lives of the learned and exhaust the fortunes of the beneficent. Vastly important it therefore is to any library which sets out with the prospect or even with the possibility of being a large one, that a comprehensive, and a rightly comprehensive, scheme for the disposition of it externally be had in the very origin of things. But who is *now* to say—to say in advance of actual experience, and in advance of the reduction of that experience to a scientific and admitted truth—what is a *rightly* comprehensive scheme for libraries such as the century on which we are entering may witness?

Finally—when the library edifice stands in broad extent erect, and its million books are arranged in order on its shelves—after this comes a problem greater than all. How, most easily—how, most economically—how to be most useful, and how to prevent the necessity of frequently rearranging, of frequently reprinting that which in its largest part has once or oftener, with great pains, been arranged, and once or oftener, with great cost, been printed—how best to secure all these ends, are these immense collections which stand up in more than imagination before us—to be classified and arranged in the printed *catalogue*? Supplements, of course, are easily to be made; but when we shall have looked painfully through some dozen volumes of catalogue, how are we to follow up the search still more painfully through some scores of pamphlet supplements? We shall abandon our search in despair.

To a certain extent all the questions of which I speak have been for some years serious questions, and for some years have occupied the minds of thoughtful librarians everywhere throughout our country. But even of the latest years they have been questions of no difficulty compared with that difficulty which the future is beginning to reveal to our view.

I have said, gentlemen, that there are several problems for us to resolve. But after these problems have been resolved in the abstract, resolved, I mean, in a general way, we have many matters also acting as forces of “perturbation,” the exact value of which we must calculate and allow for. The conclusions as to local arrangement, or as to the form of catalogues which would be true ones for a library of consultation, for a library which is the resort of men of trained and disciplined minds—might prove false in a library destined for circulation chiefly; that is to say, for popular use; and the rule which would rightly prevail in a library seeking a universal character might not be found so good for collections that are content with more limited outlines. A hundred qualifications suggest themselves in

every part of our subject to any conclusions which we might form on any general head.

In the midst of these questions, some of which seem nearly insoluble—and terrified as we are by the prospect of library edifices to which Versailles, the Escorial, or the Vatican shall be of humble size—comes a new question altogether; a question radical and revolutionary. Will it be practicable to continue through another century the formation of libraries, which shall contain all books upon every subject? Will not such libraries if continued and formed tumble to pieces by their own weight, and when the subjects into which their infinite volumes are divided have all grown sufficiently large, break up and resolve themselves into their primordial elements? Our general libraries have already unloaded themselves of law, unloaded themselves of medicine, and unloaded themselves to a large degree of all books of mere physical science. Why shall they not throw off divinity and metaphysics, and a hundred other things; leaving each to establish itself as law has done, as medicine has done, as physical science in part has done, on its own special basis, and leaving itself, too, disintegrated into unity of subject. This would give us a hundred small libraries in the place of one immense one; and doubtless in some respects a small library devoted to a single subject has advantages over a large one, which is rarely perfectly complete in any.

Supposing pamphlets to come forth for another century as pamphlets are now coming forth, and for that other century to be preserved, the collection would fill a room larger than the Bodleian. No general library will or can ever preserve the half of them. Yet while in many cases most useless, in many cases they are most useful, and where not useful often most curious. A library of pamphlets—a library which should embrace everything that bears a pamphlet's title, and which should exclude everything which does not—would be a library often and to many of great utility.

Nay, why shall we not go further?

If railway companies, and coal companies, and hospitals, and colleges, and penitentiaries, and benevolent institutions of every sort—to say nothing of historical societies and library companies—keep publishing their annual reports for another century as they publish them now, may it not require the most active labor of the best librarian in America to collect, to preserve, to bind, to arrange, and catalogue them all? Yet few books are more instructive as to special matters; few more often wanted by a large class of readers.

But here the benignant Genius which ever presides over the labors of the learned interposes. “Your thoughts are at variance with the ideas of the learned in every age and every clime. They are rebellious and irreverent. They savor of State rights. They look unkindly at the Union. All the sorts of knowledge dwell lovingly in one abode. All the forms of truth live ever in unity and love. Diplomacy and statesmanship here are met together. Science and revelation here have kissed each other. Build your edifices as large as you will. Let story rise above story, and wings spread for infinite distance, the capacities of your main edifice. The very volumes which you fear will kindly show you how to use the largest of them all as easily as in earlier days you have used those which were among the smallest. Is not the ‘elevator’ to be seen in every large factory and in every large hotel? Does not the elastic tube afford means of transmitting messages through the largest buildings of our cities? Why may not the electric telegraph, itself the child of science, minister to her honored parent; and why may not the librarian, seated at his desk in the centre or on the circumference of his library-room, send his orders to the remotest part of the immensest building, to be obeyed, perhaps, through the pneumatic tube, returning with a velocity only less than that of the telegraph itself, the volume which he asks for? Are ropes and pulleys, which the world has used these thousand years, and which are used in every large

factory to carry parcels from floor to floor and from one extremity of the edifice to another, to be forgotten in the places where their history and uses are recorded in a hundred tomes, and at a time when they should be called on for their noblest work?

“Why, indeed, if locomotion in horizontal space is largely needed—why may not the railway itself—traversed perhaps by cars whose form shall be the library’s cushioned chair—drawn by some graceful ‘dummy’ whose silence shall not disturb even ‘the still air of delightful studies’—why shall not the railway itself, laid in bars of steel so polished that friction and noise no less than space are annihilated—why shall not even it come in and complete the ministration which the mechanic arts, if rightly invoked, will ever be proud to give to the labors of the learned and the good? Books of municipal law; books of medicine and surgery; books of mere science; books for professional use alone, these you can segregate from others of more general interest; but beyond this you cannot go. The student is referred by one book to a hundred others, all unlike it, and perhaps unlike each other. Will you send him to a hundred libraries? A hundred persons would know that such and such a building contained a library, but not one in the number might know until he had entered it and found that it was *not* the sort of library which he wanted, what sort of a library it really was. To say nothing of the fact that these special libraries might each consider that certain books belonged not to *it* but to a sister ‘special,’ so that a book which might not unreasonably be looked for in any one would be found in none; ending thus in the result that with libraries everywhere, books were nowhere.”

But, gentlemen, I will detain you no longer. With little practical experience in this matter, and with no reflection upon it at all, I see before me in the future many questions in regard to the subjects upon which I have spoken; and yet upon another subject which I have not touched, the conduct

and management of these vast libraries themselves when everything else has been adjusted. You, with your great experience and deep reflectiveness, I doubt not must have seen and now behold a hundred more. Before another century rolls by they will be practical questions.

I know of no way in which these questions can be settled, but the way in which questions of science are always settled; that is to say, by careful observation and collation of facts, and, when facts sufficiently numerous are observed and collated, by the application of intelligent judgment, and the formation, through induction, of a sound result. The field is a large one. It is completely and purely a field of science. The same careful observation of phenomena which is necessary in astronomy, in chemistry, in medicine; the same right judgment to perceive what they teach, which gives to the world a Herschel, a Davy, or a Physick—these same are the qualities which are needed for any valuable conclusions about the work of which I speak. The time has arrived then for a new science—BIBLIOTHECAL SCIENCE, a wide science, a difficult science, a science of value.

Gentlemen, a good librarian has ever been a valuable minister to letters. He has always stood between the world of authors and the world of readers, introducing the habitants of one sphere to the habitants of the other; interpreting often obscurities where the fault is with authors, imparting often intelligence where the fault is with readers. This, his ancient title, he still possesses. But in this day and for the future he is called to new offices and to higher distinctions. His profession belongs to the SCIENCES. He requires some fine faculties of mind. He takes his rank with philosophers.

To promote this science you, gentlemen, assemble to-day. Much to be considered, so far as it relates to the future, is new. The soundings upon the old charts have imperfect value. New soundings and new observations must be taken by yourselves. I hardly suppose that numerous conclusions of value will be reached at once. But it is a great thing to

have met in corporate strength, with a united sense that much is needed, and with united experience and reflection and wisdom to consider by way of remedy what is wanted. I doubt not that this Congress will be the first of a series of Bibliothecal conventions, or congresses of librarians; that your purposes as yet in part unshaped will here take form, and that future years will feel the beneficial influence of what is here accomplished.

Most cordially, therefore, and again do I welcome you to our city and to our Hall, and pray for every blessing upon your consultations and your work.

